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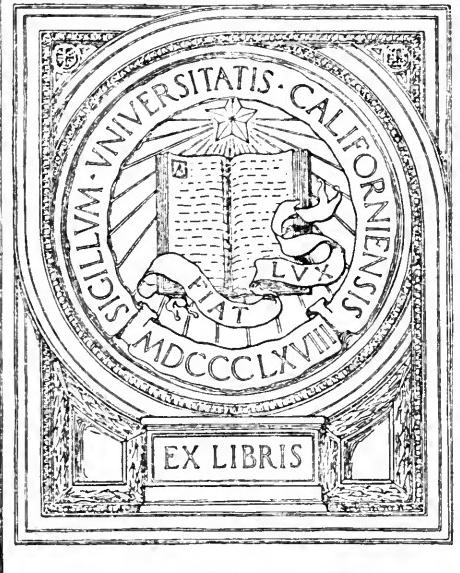
Jesus And The Thought Of The  
World

By

The Rabbi Martin A. Meyer  
The Rev. Bradford Leavitt  
The Rev. C. F. Aked

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*Sermons preached in the Temple Emanu-El*

*San Francisco*

*on*

*Sunday, January 25, 1914*

*and*

*Sunday, February 1, 1914*

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# *The Jewish View of Jesus*

By

*The Rabbi Martin A. Meyer, Ph. D.*

*Sunday Morning, January 25, 1914*



## THE JEWISH VIEW OF JESUS.

Friends, in one way I rejoice in the triunity, in which I have the honor to be the first speaker; in another sense I regret it. I rejoice that we can discuss such a theme—that you have invited me, a Jew, to discuss this matter with you. On the other hand I regret its futility, save as regards the liberal attitude it may encourage, for, after all is said and done, you are not going to be persuaded by me, and I fancy I shall not be persuaded by you. It reminds me of the public disputations held in the Middle Ages between Jews and Catholics; the futile result was usually the same. The Jews went away feeling they had presented irrefutable arguments on their side, and the Catholics, to disprove these arguments, generally caused many Jews either to be put to death or to be forcibly baptized; so, of course, the question remained just where it was for both parties.

It goes without saying that we are talking as friends, honest friends, one with the other, just as honestly as I should expect that a Christian would discuss some point in my Jewish belief with me—differing from me naturally, because he is a Christian and I am a Jew, agreeing with me at certain points because he is a Christian and I am a Jew. Yet each of us must frankly present his own point of view without malice, with no idea of controversy, yet each emphasizing his angle of vision.

Frankly, the whole matter of the world's views of the person of Jesus is one of those subjects that I feel will only be understood by the presentation of every point of view. I have spent my last week, not in reading what the Jews have to say about Jesus, but reading a Roman Catholic

treatise telling me what the Catholic Church has to say about Christ, so that I might thoroughly appreciate what the orthodox view of his life is.

Orthodox Judaism has nothing to do, absolutely nothing to do, with Jesus or Christianity. No Jew could ever understand how the religion preaching love could have persecuted the Jews and Judaism unfailingly, generation after generation. The result on the part of the orthodox Jew was an unqualified contempt for everything Christian. Nor did he hesitate to express his feelings in this matter. It crystallized itself in a Hebrew version of the life of Jesus, in which all the facts of that life were explained on a frankly naturalistic basis. It further expressed itself in an abundant polemic and apologetic literature, in which these bold spirits placed the Jewish viewpoint before a hostile world. It indulged freely in criticism of Christian doctrines; contradicted the prevailing Christian exegesis of the Old Testament and even did not hesitate to speak its mind of Christian practices and persecutions. It was the frank expression of a self-reliant, self-intelligent group, who feared nothing more than faithlessness to its ideal. Many a one paid for his boldness with his life, after having been subjected to unspeakable torture; but once understand the point of view of this little handful of rejected and misunderstood people, as found in the literature of the Jew of the Middle Age, and you can appreciate the spirit of the Jew in all ages. If you want to understand that remarkable age of history you must remember that the dark ages of Christianity were parallel with an age of unparalleled spiritual and intellectual glory for the Jew; that it was not until the year 1492, after the world seemed to have refused its last resting-place to the Jew, that what we regard as the dark ages of Jewry had their beginning.

In the era of the highest spiritual culture of the Jew, there were great spirits who had a larger view of the place of Christianity and Islam in the world economy, consistent with their loyalty to Judaism. The great Spanish philosopher and poet, Jehuda Halevi (not to know his

impassioned muse is to be ignorant of one of the greatest souls of the world of song) and the no less distinguished Maimonides, physician, philosopher and guide to the perplexed (to whose works such great lights of the Christian world as Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus did not hesitate to resort for instruction) made the splendid point that both of the daughter faiths of Judaism were doing a God-appointed work. They were disseminating Jewish truth though in non-Jewish form; partial, to be sure, but such work would eventually usher in the final synthesis of the Messianic era.

The beginning of the nineteenth century marked a new era in Jewish thought and belief. We generally refer to this as the era of modern Judaism, for it was then that the Jews again turned their attention to their own literature and their own history, and were permitted to mingle with the world outside the ghetto and hear of its achievements and learn its value. In the study of religion and the sources of religion both from the ethnological and from the comparative point of view, the modern Jew learned much about the Jewish elements of Christianity; but he recognized at the very outset that the Jewish element was but one among the many which went into the mosaic which is called Christianity.

Regarding the question of the historicity of Jesus—there are many who deny it, and they are backed up by very profound arguments—we shall omit all such discussion and shall assume for our purposes that Jesus did exist.

I take it as expressive of my whole point of view, that Jesus the Jew is not the equivalent of the Christ preached in the churches throughout the centuries. You who follow recent theological literature may remember that this point of view is not alien to the point of view of a number of very earnest Christians. They hold that because of the comparative failure of the attempt to find the actual words and absolutely uncontrovertible facts of the life of Jesus, as presented in the gospels and epistles, the real Jesus is not to be found other than in the creeds of the churches

as taught throughout the centuries. Scientific researches had reduced the desired incontrovertible facts to a vanishing minimum. Consequently, with the courage of despair, they have set aside all the results of the historical school and have taken refuge in the dogmas of the churches. It is the Christ idea that is important; the historical character less significant. But our view though apparently similar is just the very opposite. We arrive at a similar statement by a far different line of reasoning.

In the first flush of enthusiasm following upon the statement of the newer attitude of sympathetic understanding of the life of Jesus and of Christianity, many Jews lost their traditional balance entirely. Many saw in Christianity a fulfilled Judaism and so were ready to announce their allegiance to the daughter faith. Others not ready to go to this extreme made themselves similarly conspicuous by their loud protestations of the loss to Judaism of its centuries-old attitude towards his personality and the faith proclaimed in his name. They were keen to have Jesus and his doctrine taught in Jewish religious schools, to have Jesus hailed as a long-lost brother, as the last, if not the greatest of the Jewish prophets. I do not believe that either of these extreme groups represents the judgment of the best minds of modern Jewry. The attitude of these is far more insistent upon the validity and the sufficiency of Judaism as a system of faith and of life.

The matter of the modern Jewish point of view of the life of Jesus is determined by careful study of the gospels themselves. In the gospels we find a number of elements. We find, first of all, an element indicating most markedly what we shall call Gentile influence; for example, the influence of Alexandria upon the gospels cannot be gainsaid. The influence of both Greek and Egyptian is evident upon careful study of the gospel, for it is well established that the gospels, etc., got their final form in Alexandria. We might go further and say that there were evidences of Babylonian and Hindoo influence. These influences we find jointly expressed in the stories of the miraculous birth,

of the atoning death and the miraculous resurrection of Jesus; and as Jews we will have none of these.

We next notice what might be called the Judaeo-Hellenistic part of the New Testament, with particular reference to the "logos" theory as expounded in the Fourth Gospel, that of St. John, as well as the allegorizing and antinomian tendencies in various parts of the Testament. This line of thought had its inception in the attempted harmonization of Greek philosophy and Hebrew prophetism which was popular among the Jews of Egypt. The chief exponent of this peculiar philosophy was the famous Philo of Alexandria. Philo, by the way, was a contemporary of Jesus, but in all his numerous works he makes no mention or reference to the work or life of Jesus. It is said that Philo judaized Platonism and Platonized Judaism. Characteristic of his work and that of all his school was the allegorical method of Bible interpretation. The normal Jewish development in Palestine saw in this method a menace to its religious life, and consequently rejected it. They saw its ultimate exaggerations and dangers, for it was a short and easy step from sanity to wildness, and the Jew has been sane at all times in his religious positions. Nascent Christianity was deeply influenced by this school of thought. In fact, Philo was popular with the Church Fathers rather than with his own people. He has been claimed as a Christian, though there is no basis in fact for such a claim. While we can trace the development of the philonic position from Jewish sources, particularly from the Wisdom Literature of Israel, its position was more acceptable to Christianity than to Judaism. The strict monotheism of Judaism felt itself compromised by the theories of this school. Later Christianity felt the full force of the exaggerated position assumed by the teachers of this line of thought. Further, the antagonistic position held to the Law (as the Hebrew word "Torah" is loosely translated) was decidedly alien to the thought of the Jew. I can but refer you to that remarkable little book of Travers Herford on Pharisaism (the author is a Christian minister, mind you) for a presenta-

tion of the attitude of the Jew to his Torah and to all movements inimical to its integrity. So the Jew perforce finds no share in that presentation of Jesus which was determined by St. John and St. Paul, nor in that Christianity which grew out of their teachings. And Christianity as we know it through the centuries was profoundly modified by this point of view.

I next notice what we might call the chauvinistic Jewish element of the gospel. It is but one of a half-dozen presentations of Jesus. There is evidence that there was one interpretation—one element of the gospel, which presented a Jesus whose interest was wholly and solely within the confines of Israel; and we find Rabbis of that period such as Shammai, the associate of Hillel, and Akiba, the rabbi hero of the last war against the Romans, who held the same point of view—a mission of the Jew to the Jew himself. It is the picture of a Jesus intent on the internal reform of his people. In such passages as “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to the dogs” in reply to the request of the Phoenician woman to heal her daughter, and “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast pearls before swine,” a Jesus is presented to us who is a Hebrew of the Hebrews. Let it be understood that even the most intense Hebrew did not refuse to accept non-Jews into the fold of his people and his faith, but such acceptance had to be on the terms laid down by the Hebrews. And in this same manner, too, have all historic religions of which we have knowledge accepted converts. Catholicism will not accept the convert unless he admit the primacy of the Pope, nor will the Evangelical, unless the would-be proselyte accept the typical doctrines of his position, such as the Trinity and the atoning value of the death of Jesus. That the Jew laid down the conditions on which others might be admitted to his fold was well within his right. And history tells us that there were large numbers who were ready to enter Judaism under these conditions. The Evangelist himself admitted that “Pharisees compassed land and sea to make one convert.” And in every town

of importance in the Mediterranean world there were large groups of proselytes and would-be proselytes. The intense feeling against the Roman oppressor of Judea brought many a fierce denunciation of the gentile to the lips of the Jew which in milder times had never been uttered. Yet so intense a Jew as Akiba, the great teacher of the literal method of Bible exegesis, found it compatible with his zealous advocacy of Judaism to teach that the greatest verse in the Bible was Genesis, v. 1, "This is the book of the generations of Adam," "for," said he, "it teaches us who is our neighbor."

We find yet another element—an exceedingly important element—what I would call the Liberal Jewish Element, such as is evidenced in the Lord's Prayer, and particularly in the original Sermon on the Mount, not so much in the version thereof as expanded by later writers. Here we find ourselves in the company of Hillel, whose statement of the Golden Rule is parallel to that found in the gospels; who interpreted the Golden Rule as the essence of the Torah, of Jewish religious culture. His mildness was proverbial, his influence widespread, not only because of his profound knowledge of the technical interpretation of Bible and custom, but because of his deep passion for morality and for righteousness. We find ourselves in the company of Jochanan ben Zakkai, that great teacher of the Reconstruction of Jewish life, who taught that as the sacrificial system was a thing of the past and forever done with, that prayer and charity should take the place of this ritual. Frankly, with this passionate ethical and spiritual presentation of Jesus we find ourselves in the company of a phase of Jesus which is most Jewish, Jewish in the best sense of the term. Like his contemporaries he stood within the House of Israel, but his vision was beyond the House of Israel. He, too, stood on those heights which we recognize as strictly Jewish, whose base was the House of Israel, whose outlook was all mankind.

Of course, I appreciate that you may say that it is this ethical presentation of Jesus which you recognize as most

truly Jesianic, in which you find the Jesus that modern Christianity is emphasizing as its very own. But my point is that it is just this Jesus teaching the doctrine of repentance and the Kingdom of God, the religion of the heart, and of love, of the Golden Rule, of the supreme claim of the ethical as against the strictly ritual who stands on strictly Jewish ground, neither adding thereto nor subtracting therefrom. It is the religion of the prophets of Israel and their descendants which he is voicing. The glorious vision of the second Isaiah foreseeing the ingathering of the peoples of the world is never excelled in religious literature; and Hosea's story of the prodigal wife is no less tender than the parable of the prodigal son. I wish to say a word of warning against the Jewish "man in the street" who, ignorant of both New and Old Testaments, not to mention the traditional literature of the Jew—hardly less precious in the eyes of the Jew and certainly of vast significance at this point—who essays to pass judgment upon these important questions, who jumps at conclusions because he sees superficial resemblances, and does not see the processes behind the surface facts. In that wonderful literature which the Jew produced, a veritable ocean, needing the steady hand of a pilot as well as compass and knowledge of the stars for its safe crossing, the informed Jew finds all those elements of Jesus' teaching just enumerated, and frequently the very language is identical.

For instance, the oft-quoted verse, so significant for the Catholic Church: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock do I build my church." This is paralleled by a Midrash (i. e., a popular Bible homily) in which the very language is used with reference to Abraham, the father of the faithful. Again, take the verse: "Judge not, lest ye be judged," and compare it with the verses from "The Sayings of the Fathers": "Judge no man till thou stand in his place" and "Judge every man from the side of graciousness and generosity." It is evident that the one has been borrowed from the other, or probably, with more fairness, both were derived from a common source. Jesus as a lad in the

schools of Galilee had learned the old Jewish literature, the literature of his people. That he quotes from that source, that he adapts from that literature is no more to be wondered at than that a modern should quote Goethe or Browning, modifying the original to his own end. But clever as the adaptation or anthology may be, one would never think of attributing originality to such a writer or preacher. Harnack, the great student of dogmatics, tells us that he finds the emphasis new in the teaching of Jesus. But we must differ from his conclusions for in the Jewish literature contemporary with and even precedent to the time of Jesus we find the very points which are singled out as typical of his position, receiving more and more attention.

And I want to call attention to a certain, to me significant, fact at this point. In the career of every Jewish teacher there were two marked and yet mutually dependent activities. One is called the Halachic, roughly the interpretation of the rules and the establishment of the norms of the religious life, ritual, dogmatic and ethical. This is frequently referred to as the legalistic work of the rabbis. On the other side there was what was called the Haggadic, which we can best describe as the popular, homiletic activity, in which Bible verses got their spiritual reading, the lesson being driven home by the frequent use of parable, aphorism and legend. We have both sides of the activity of the rabbis preserved to us. Of Jesus we have but the Haggadic element preserved due to the disregard of the church of the nomistic tendencies of Judaism. Yet there are evidences that Jesus knew and used the method of the rabbis. It has been pointed out that his language can be best understood when translated back into the terminology of the schools, and his argument in proving the immortality of the soul in debate with the Sadducees as reported in the three gospels is to be taken as typical of the method of the schoolmen of his day. If we had but the Haggadic side of the rabbis of his day preserved, the parallels would be still more striking. We Jews find much satisfaction in

the thought of the priority of Jewish teaching along those very lines which now you stress as typical of the Christian position.

There is still another element in the gospels and the Testament which I feel I must speak of. It might be termed the anti-Jewish element. I can understand the apologetics of these facts but the facts themselves furnish an important element in the determination of our concept of the person of Jesus and of Christianity too. We take exception to the wholesale and intemperate denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees. That there were hypocrites in ancient Israel is as natural, I am sure, as there are hypocrites in modern America. That the Jews themselves knew that there were such and set up the old standards of a clean heart is known to every student of the literature of that period. But these very scribes and Pharisees were the teachers of Jesus and preserved that form of the religious life which survived temple and priesthood. We recognize in these passionate passages not only the fervor of moral disapproval of hypocrisy, etc., but also an attempt to put the Jews before the Gentile world in as bad a light as possible. Similarly, the picture tones down the asperity of the truth about the Roman rulers of Palestine so that the gospel might be the more readily accepted by the Gentiles to whom it was presented. The ancient secular historians, for example, are not sparing of the dark colors with which they paint the portrait of Pontius Pilate. Rather than do anything to favor the clamors of the Jewish public it was his delight to thwart them at every turn, to humiliate them beyond words. The gospel shows Pilate in such delicate tones as to cause profound questioning as to the reliability of the picture and to suggest that there was the desire to throw the onus of the death of Jesus from the shoulders of the Romans to those of the Jews. And we Jews must reject such elements as these, as no doubt you will reject everything I say this morning which does not agree with your point of view. We cannot picture a Jesus, a Jew, who curried favor with the Roman powers. If the picture is

consistent, the heart which beat with such warm sympathy for mankind, must have had that much Jewish loyalty in its Jewish blood to feel for the shame and humiliation to which his people were then subjected and to share in the hope of the amelioration of their sad condition. We would not like to see Jesus in the same class of dubious patriots such as Flavius Josephus.

No doubt many of you will resort to the pragmatic argument and appeal to what has been done in Jesus' name as the best justification of his life and works. It's a dangerous argument, friends. It's a two-edged sword. You no doubt can paint one picture of the world in the shadow of the cross, we a startlingly different one. For you, there is the vision of the poor, the suffering, the weary, finding rest and refreshment under the symbol of your faith. For us it is the sorry spectacle of generations of pain and misery under the consecration of that same symbol; and the suffering not yet ended even in America itself. We hear the heart cries of those who have been despised and rejected of Christian men for all these ages; we know with our heart of hearts of the horrors of death, persecution and exile; of the nameless tortures of children torn from their parents and of the soul of a people crushed beneath the nameless burden of discrimination, contumely and shameful disregard of the primary rights of the human. Both sides are equally true; only do you remember the other side. And I should like to suggest that no doubt the early Christian propagandists were met by a similar argument for the reality of the gods of the nations. The Greek might urge with equal truth and fervor that the achievements of medicine under the aegis of Aesculapius were a sure sign of his reality and the progress of horticulture, viticulture and agriculture were eloquent testimonials to the validity of the persons of Ceres and Bacchus. I do not believe that this argument proves anything one way or the other. Every religion could justify itself by a similar line of reasoning. The value of the religion of the lowest savage is as real to

him as is the highest interpretation of the religious life to the most spiritual of Jews or Christians.

We Jews find in the history of Christianity certain facts which we believe have not been sufficiently considered by the world. Time and again there have been sectarian movements within Christianity which have been termed judaistic by their opponents, derisively but yet correctly. These movements may at certain points be said to have been due to the more or less direct influence of neighboring Jews. In southern France at the time of the great Albigensian heresy we know that the Jews maintained important and significant schools and academies, but to mention one of several such situations. But more important are those movements which we cannot connect with such immediate Jewish activities. Yet they too are numerous. To us they represent the attempt of the Jewish elements, which Christianity took along with it after its compromise with the Gentile world, to reassert themselves and to throw off the thrall of the other elements. More and more as the so-called liberal Christianity expresses itself does it thrust into the background these Gentile elements and assert more and more strongly the Jewish elements of its faith and of its life. It's a matter for earnest consideration. The elimination in this way of many of the miraculous and mystical elements of the Christian position is the certain but no less sure victory of the Jewish element which was carried along despite the opposition of the non-Jewish elements in the early church.

We Jews part company with the most advanced Christians on the subject of the personality of Jesus. To us he is no more divine than he is unique or sinless. We recognize in every human the divine spark of the Creator, but no more in Jesus than in any one else. There are those rare souls who spell out this divine in their lives by their faith, by their works; but they are human, fundamentally human even in the spark of the divine we find in them. Nor unique; for we find him the result of a process in which others shared with him, the process of spiritual de-

velopment of which he was by no means the sole representative in his day and generation. Nor sinless; for his rejection of his mother, his reliance upon miracles (rejected by the best Jewish thought of his day), his belief in demons, similarly refused by the leaders of his generation, his emphasis upon himself—the oft repeated, “but I say unto you”—and the limitation of his outlook by apocalyptic and millennialian considerations, all to be sure explainable upon the ground of **popular** teaching.

Let us sum up. If he lived, Jesus lived and died a Jew. The popular side of his teaching has been preserved to us with but incidental reference to the other side of his activity and method. This Jewish picture of Jesus has survived despite the other elements in the presentation for I doubt not that the ecclesiastics who so profoundly impressed themselves upon the ages long statement of Christianity would, in their anti-Jewish zeal, have still further suppressed these elements if they could. For the fourth century witnessed the triumph of the Gentile influences of Rome, Greece and Egypt. The compromise made Christianity immediately triumphant whereas the uncompromising attitude of the Jew, chiefly on the subject of the divine unity, put it at a disadvantage which was further emphasized when the persecuted turned persecutor. As late as the Middle Ages it was necessary officially to forbid the Jew to make proselytes to his faith. Despite such opposition, the Jewish element in Christianity has flourished through history, and I frankly believe it is this element in Christianity, as well as in Islam, which makes it possible for Judaism and its daughter faiths to flourish side by side in peace today; and that it is fundamental in the evolution of the Christianity of today.

Like all true Jews, Jesus was a son of the prophets not only according to the flesh, but also according to the spirit. From his mother's bosom he imbibed the ideals of his people and their faith. Firmly rooted in the heart of his people his vision, like theirs, went beyond to the limits of the world, to all the sons of men who would some day bring

their tribute to the great God of Israel. He too like the Jews of his day, like Jews before him and since him, dreamed of the realization of the Kingdom of God. That kingdom of God will not mean the rejection or suppression of any of the valid elements of life. All truths will be reduced to their elements and finding a common denominator will be reconstructed into a satisfactory whole. From these elements the world will draw its faith, and through them will be realized the dreams of the prophets and of all who have had the spirit of the prophets in them. Moses and St. Paul, Jesus and Isaiah, Augustine and Aquinas, Jane Addams and Cardinal Newman, all sons of the prophets, sons of men and sons of the divine, will contribute their quota to the realization of the ultimate harmony of human life.

We Jews stand firm not because of stubbornness or narrowness of vision, but because we would emphasize the validity of our faith; because we know that through the heart of Israel the world has been given the glimpses of the divine and the eternal which are sufficient for life and for love, for salvation and for everlasting bliss, of the individual and the world.

*What do we really know about Jesus;  
and what does his life say to us?*

*By*

*The Rev. Bradford Leavitt*

*Sunday Evening, January 25, 1914*



## WHAT DO WE REALLY KNOW ABOUT JESUS; AND WHAT DOES HIS LIFE SAY TO US?

Text, Acts X, 36-38: "*Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, . . . for God was with Him.*"

Nineteen hundred years ago a Jewish babe was born in Palestine. He was born about four years before the year one, as we now reckon time. He was the oldest son in the family of Joseph and Mary. He had brothers and sisters. His education was the common one for a Jewish boy. When He grew up He was taught the trade of a carpenter, and He worked at His trade with His father. Little is known of His childhood. His public life began when he was about thirty years old; it lasted two or three years, the accounts differ as to the time.

He travelled and taught in Galilee and in Jerusalem, and He spoke with such simplicity and power, that He made an impression on the world not equalled by any other teacher of any age. He was put to death as a martyr because He came into conflict with the ecclesiastical bigotry and prejudice of His time.

Since that day He has been the central supreme figure of the civilized world. In His name more kindnesses have been done, more cruelties committed than in the name of any other. In renown, in influence, in power there is none who comes even second to Him. The story of His life and teaching is familiar to millions to whom Alexander and Socrates, Caesar and Shakespeare are mere names, if known at all. All modern literature and laws have been moulded by what men have thought to be His spirit. The

greatest religion of the world, the religion of all the leading races of mankind is called after Him and occupied with the thought of Him. It is nearly 1900 years since He died, everything has changed—He still remains, winning to Himself the love, the devotion, the homage of each new generation of men.

Beside Him no one may take his stand; not even that other Christ of the Eastern world, Gautama Buddha, the light of Asia, dear to so many millions of the human race, in so many respects so like our Jesus. For without urging other differences, there remains always the preeminence of Him whose lordship is over the nations which have steadily advanced in knowledge, in civilization, in liberty.

But who was He, this greatest of men? The creeds can give their answer as they have given it in the same words these 1500 years. He is “God who descended from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.” And if this reply be accepted, all curiosity subsides in adoring awe.

If this answer be true, still the question forces itself upon us, What about the real, undeniable past? “He rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead”—so say our brethren, repeating their creeds this day.

Be it so; but who was He, what manner of man while yet He lived upon the earth? We have for answer only the stories of His life and sayings which were told about among His first disciples and after the lapse of forty or fifty years began to be written in short biographies which we call gospels, four of which have come down to us complete. It is commonly claimed for these that they are inspired and infallible; but as there is no proof of it, and the writers themselves do not even allude to such divine guidance, the only one who tells us about his work simply asserting that “as many had undertaken such a narrative, it seemed good to Him—not to the Holy Ghost—to do likewise, there being I say neither plea nor proof, but on the

other hand much difficulty in admitting such an extraordinary claim, we are bound, with all respect for such venerable documents to treat them as human and not divine, and to subject them therefore to searching examination.

The records we possess of Jesus are most scanty and incomplete. They are undoubtedly vitiated by many flaws inevitable among a people who had no notion of historical or biographical accuracy. It is easy to show that they constantly contradict each other, and expose to every student their own many inconsistencies. Nevertheless we hold them precious beyond all other literature in the world because they give us the only accounts, the only picture we possess of one whose influence has dominated human history and by whose thought and life the thought and life of every one of us is modified at every moment of every day.

We have no testimony of eye witnesses to the events in the life of this great religious teacher. An oral tradition began to take shape soon after His death. It passed by word of mouth from apostle to convert and from one church to another. The tradition assumed different forms as it was repeated year after year in different places—some parts grew dim, and some events and sayings were modified and embellished, while certain new elements were added. We must remember that this story was not told with a mere historical intent but to win converts and to make people believe in Jesus.

When afterwards, in the second generation of disciples, attempts were made to commit the tradition to writing Mark's gospel is generally recognized as the one giving us that tradition in its earliest form. We can place that gospel at about the year 70 A. D., 40 years after the death of Jesus. Matthew's gospel and Luke's—both of which are later than Mark's, give us many of the sayings of Jesus not found in the former. The gospel according to John was not written until the second century was well advanced. From this gospel, which is a philosophical treatise, very little can be learned concerning the historic Jesus. There are hundreds of existing manuscripts of the New Testa-

ment, some in small fragments, others nearly or wholly complete. There are thousands of different readings. The oldest of these manuscripts goes back to the fourth century. We know that as the writings were copied by scribes and monks many changes were made, some through carelessness, some intentionally to clear up a doubtful passage, some deliberately to make the reading conform to some doctrinal bias. We know that a large number of gospels were written in addition to the four in our Bible—some of these we have today, some have been lost and are known only through quotations in other ancient writings.

Now what bearing have the numerous and radical discoveries in regard to the real character of the gospels upon our views of Jesus? We want to make our ideas about Him square with the facts. We care not for the ideas of the church councils of the Middle Ages—councils made up of men far more ignorant than the scholars of today.

We want to find the real Jesus, and we ask liberty for the hungry human heart to seek after Him. "We have got to go back of the gospels and when we are there, as the result of all the careful study and research of years, we believe that we find Him—the son of the carpenter in Nazareth; but, while the carpenter's son, the grandest of all the sons of men, the flowering, the supreme result of the life, the inspiration, the hunger and thirst of that nation which has been distinguished beyond all other peoples for its genius in the realm of religion—the last and greatest of the teachers and prophets, the holy men of the great Hebrew race."

Suppose we revolt against the old dogmatic ideas inherited from the middle and dark ages, and side with the interpretations that modern knowledge has given of man and of his relations to the world and to God. We shall then open these biographies of Jesus and find everything natural, human, reasonable. No theological mists shall hang over that life to distort its meaning or supernaturalize its character. "We shall know that there was no fall, no inherited guilt, and therefore no divine anger to be ap-

peased, and no need of a supernatural mediator. We shall look upon those pages as human writings with the errors and misinterpretations incident to human authorship. We shall see in these strange accounts of a miraculous birth, of singing angels, of the raising of the dead, only the wonder stories that blossomed in the imagination of loving but credulous disciples." We shall lose the unnatural and impossible Christ of theology; we shall find the real and living Jesus of history; Jesus in the human line of inheritance, born as any other man is born. It is not strange that men have worshipped Him as God. He was the highest and best of the sons of men, summing up the best that the race is capable of—man, the promise of what is to come. Divine, yes, as all men are divine; only in Him there would seem to be all of the life of God that could be poured into a human soul—so that he was the fullest expression of the divinity of man, and of the humanity of God.

But whatever our views about Jesus, is it not clear that the main thing, the important thing, is that we believe in Him? We may hold very different ideas as to Jesus' relation to his Father, as to the doctrines men have put into creeds about Him, but it must be clear to us all that to believe in Him and to follow Him it is not necessary we should hold the same views about Him.

And now I ask, what is it this life of Jesus says to us? Is it not clear that to follow Jesus Christ is something more than to subscribe to a creed, take part in public worship, support by money or service the institutions of religion? Is it not clear that it is more than what we commonly call religion? It is deliberately to consecrate oneself to the cause of righteousness and truth in the world, cost what that consecration may; to engage in a life campaign against every form of iniquity—political, industrial, individual—wheresoever that campaign may lead. It is to make material civilization take its second and rightful place. It is never to take the standard of one's age as one's own, even for the sake of improving

it. It is to challenge every form of corruption in high places or in popular prejudices, or expressed in popular clamor. It means for the pulpit to rebuke Pharisaism in its own pews—the press to attack prejudices in its own party. It means for the lawyer to be a minister of justice, the manufacturer to hate adulterations, the mechanic and laborer to hate dishonest work. It means an infinite pity for the suffering, the poor, the unworthy. And it means much more.

How rankly, intolerably false it is to hear men say, as Christendom has said these 2000 years: Now I know I am saved because I have the blood of Christ, the sacraments of Christ, the sacrifice of Christ to intercede for me! How pitiable to see men and women who fancy that to bow at His name is enough; to kneel before the crucifix is enough; to repeat his own prayer over and over again is enough; to hold this or that view of his person is enough; to acknowledge his supremacy is enough! How pitiable! And yet here is a profound truth beneath a splendid lie. To bow one's own haughty selfishness before the divine meekness—to kneel in awe before the presence of the life that courted death thus to accomplish its holy purpose; to say "Our Father, who art in heaven" with the tender trust that he put into that prayer; to proclaim the perfect man, the anointed Son of God as one's hero-pattern; surely, this is, after all, to be saved! To hold that cross ever before one's eyes, is not that the banner leading thousands to the crusades? Is not that the flaming vision that led Constantine, that led Arnold the schoolmaster, that led Gordon the soldier, that led Peabody the merchant, that led Dorothea Dix, the frail woman, that led Robertson the preacher, that led Milton the poet, and shone on the pathway of the Pilgrim who overcame sea and savage to found an American commonwealth? Wherever I see a man of passionate mould and fiery blood making himself gentle; wherever I see men who might be idle, working seriously; wherever the scholar seeks and proclaims the truth as he sees it; wherever the soldier

is merciful; wherever the rich are simple and gracious; wherever the poor are unaffected and cheerful; wherever sorrow smiles through its tears; where disappointment and failure still work on in trust; wherever sin is defeated and hope is triumphant—there one sees the Cross again, bright with the light that never fades, bringing the blessing of God.

“Behold Him now where he comes!  
Not the Christ of our subtle creeds,  
But the light of our hearts—of our homes,  
Of our hopes, our prayers, our needs;  
The brother of want and blame,  
The lover of women and men,  
With a love that puts to shame  
All passions of mortal ken.  
“Ah, no! Thou life of the heart,  
Never shalt thou depart!  
Not till the leaven of God  
Shall lighten each human clod;  
Not till the world shall climb  
To thy height serene, sublime,  
Shall the Christ who enters our door,  
Pass to return no more.”



*Jesus Christ as Preached by the Liberal  
School of Modern Theology*

*By*

*The Rev. C. F. Aked, D.D., LL.D.*

*Sunday Morning, February 1, 1914*



## JESUS CHRIST AS PREACHED BY THE LIBERAL SCHOOL OF MODERN THEOLOGY.

*In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.*  
John 1:4.

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Nearly nineteen hundred years ago, in a remote corner of the Roman Empire, in an Asiatic province bordering upon the Mediterranean Sea, Jesus of Nazareth appeared. He belonged to a working-class family. When He was about thirty years of age He abandoned His day labor and began to teach and preach. Soon the churches closed their doors against Him. He gathered crowds and preached to them in the streets and fields. In less than three years He was arrested, charged with sedition, and after a short trial in the midnight hours of a turbulent week—a trial the legality of which is more than disputable—He was put to death. Within three days a few women and many men declared that He was not dead; that He had risen from the dead; and that they had seen Him.

Now the story of this life has profoundly affected the life of the world. As a matter of fact civilisation has grown up round the name of Christ. Historians, Christian or non-Christian, have to speak of the movements and developments of civilisation since the death of Jesus as “Christian civilisation.” This period of the world’s history is called the Christian era. Every letter which you wrote yesterday was dated and every cheque which you will sign to-morrow will be dated from the year of His birth. You may be a Jew in San Francisco or a Christian in Chicago or a Pagan in New York or a Christian Scientist in Boston or an Atheist in Paris, but you will sign your letters and date your cheques from the year of His birth. You may write a book for the purpose of showing that

Jesus never lived; and when you get the proof-sheets from the printer you will find that on the title page in the imprint has been inserted the year of publication, dated from the birth of One you have tried to prove had no existence! Cities have been founded, have flourished, and been swept away, kingdoms have been consolidated or torn to pieces, empires have crumbled to dust and ashes and others have arisen, solely by reason of forces upheaved by His influence, by the words He spoke, and by the spirit He bequeathed.

Interest in Him and in His work is not waning. Fourteen years ago the Dowager Empress of China decreed the death of every Christian found within her realm. You know the story: the Boxer rising, martyrdoms, massacres, bloodshed unspeakable. Less than twelve months ago the rulers of the new Republic of China officially, as a Government utterance, asked for the prayers of Christian people everywhere, prayers for wisdom and divine guidance and the blessing of God upon the Republic. There are more Christians in the world to-day than there were yesterday; there will be more to-morrow than there are to-day.

Reflection upon the character of Jesus of Nazareth has won from the thinkers of the ages, not by any means to be ranked amongst His professed followers, tributes which exhaust the powers of praise.

Goethe, for instance, looked for advance in every field of human enterprise save in one. "The moral majesty of the Gospels," he said, "could never be excelled."

In this Goethe was but echoing the deliberately expressed opinion of Spinoza, who saw in Christ "the temple of man, where God stands most perfectly revealed."

Strauss, too, held up Jesus to admiration "as the supreme religious genius of time, who created and embodied the absolute religion."

This phrase about the "absolute religion" recalls Renan's great words to the effect that on the day that Jesus talked with the woman of Samaria by Jacob's well "He founded

the pure worship of all ages, of all lands; not the best religion, but the absolute religion, and was truly Son of God."

Rousseau in his theatrical way contrasted the death of Socrates with the death of Jesus, and said that while Socrates died like a hero Jesus died like a god.

In less flamboyant speech John Stuart Mill toward the close of his life declared that after all one can do no better, when puzzled as to conduct, than ask what Jesus would do under such conditions—and do that!

Obviously such a life cannot be understood in a moment nor defined in a phrase. I love to fall back upon this mystic word taken from the prologue to John's Gospel: *In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.* I see in Jesus of Nazareth the Christ of God, the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father of us all. He is the consummation of the divine purpose of redemption.

The story which seems to begin with the birth at Bethlehem really begins with the postulate of all religion, God! In the beginning—God! But the Creator of the heavens and the earth could not tolerate a solitary splendor. Our minds refuse to think of Him existent and all else non-existent. He utters Himself in the material universe; earth and air and sea, suns and spheres and stellar space, are His efforts toward self-expression. Upon this planet He calls into being Man. He speaks *in* Man; He speaks *to* men. The human family increases, multiplies, replenishes the earth. Nations thrive and branch from clime to clime. And still God speaks to men. To the sages of China, the dreamers of India, the warrier-seers of Persia, the poets, artists, philosophers of Greece and Rome, came the Word of the Lord; and in every nation arose prophets who spoke for Him, saints who lived for Him, and martyrs who died for Him. Men of the ancient Hebrew race caught His great accents clearest and spoke them trumpet-tongued to the world. They are Jews and we are Christians—but we are what they have made us.

Their literature we call not a literature, but a book, and not a book but *the Book*, the World's Book, God's Book, the Bible. Their genius was more glorious than that of the race which gave Pheidias and Plato to the world; theirs was the genius of religion; and their religion is the imperishable possession of mankind. Their "stern monotheism" has become our belief in the immanence of the Living God. Their passion for righteousness is our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Their Messianic Hope is our assurance of immortality in Christ the Resurrection and the Life. God having thus, in divers portions and in divers manners, spoken of old time unto the fathers of the race by prophets, has, in the climax of His incarnation, spoken unto us by a Son, Jesus Christ, who has taught us to call Him Father, who is Himself Mind of the Father's Mind and Thought of the Father's Thought, who is to us the Messiah of the Jews, the Desire of all Nations, the Hope of the World, the Saviour of the Race, the Redeemer of Mankind.

Some of these words call for definition. It would be pleasant to continue this statement of the things most assuredly believed amongst us in this spirit, in the mood of positive affirmation, omitting the negative propositions, speaking only of that which is. It could be done. But one has to take into account the temperamental necessities of many different persons, and for some it is necessary to bring into prominence the things which are excluded or omitted. The newest and most useful of the dictionaries prides itself upon the introduction of what it calls antonyms; that is to say, the opposite meanings of words, as though it were to define "dark" by "not light" or "sour" by "not sweet." So I call your attention to the words that are not used.

It is not said that Jesus Christ is God. That is a statement of some of the ancient creeds. No New Testament writer ever spoke of Jesus Christ as God. It would have

seemed to Evangelist or Apostle an unheard-of blasphemy. He would have rent his clothes and flung ashes upon his head in horror at the suggestion. I accept and make my own and glory in every ascription of praise which the inspired writers employed, every word of adoration, of love and worship. Bring me any word of any New Testament writer, with its largest, fullest, loftiest worship of our Lord. I accept it, make it my own, glory in it. But I will not be coerced into the use of language employed by the old creed-builders unjustified by the language of the New Testament. "Very God of very God," you may go on repeating as you repeat the Nicene Creed. But you must not think that you are quoting the New Testament. Creeds are changed in the changing centuries! When the Council of Constantinople had done with the creed set forth by the Council of Nicæa, of the one hundred and seventy-eight words in the Constantinopolitan Creed only thirty-three had been taken from the Nicene! And Dean Stanley, one of the noblest sons of that Church which clings to creeds, says curiously:

"We might, if we chose, vex ourselves by the thought that every time we recite the Creed in its present altered form we have departed from the intention of the Fathers of Nicæa, and incurred deprivation and excommunication at the hands of the Fathers of Ephesus. We might insist on returning to the only Catholic form of the Creed, such as it was before it was corrupted at Constantinople, Chalcedon, Toledo, and London. . . . The fact that the whole Christian world has altered the Creed of Nicæa, and broken the decree of Ephesus, without ceasing to be Catholic or Christian, is a decisive proof that common sense, after all, is the supreme arbiter and corrective even of Ecumenical Councils."

It is wiser and safer to speak of Scriptural realities in Scriptural phraseology. No Scripture writer ever spoke of Jesus Christ as God.\*

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\*Romans 9:5 must not be misunderstood. It is misunderstood when read from the versions in common use. It is a phrase in the nature of a doxology. Dr. Moffatt's translation gives it correctly: "Blessed for evermore be the God who is over all! Amen."

Dr. James Denney, the leading theologian of Great Britain, a

The word “Trinity” is not employed. “God in three persons, blessed Trinity,” is a line from a popular hymn and may represent the thought and the words of the ancient creeds. But “Trinity” is not in the New Testament, neither is any phrase about “three persons in the Godhead.” It has been found helpful to think of a three-fold manifestation of God: as the Creative Intelligence, incarnate in the Redeeming Son, operative in the continuing activities of the Holy Spirit. It may be more helpful to you to think of God in this way than to confuse thought with phrases about three persons in one. This morning before you left home you acted as a father. To-morrow morning in your office you will act as an employer of labor. The next day it may be, called upon jury service or casting your ballot, you will act as a citizen. Father, employer of labor, citizen: you act in three capacities; your individuality is one. We may think of God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Father who thinks and loves; we may see in Jesus Christ the incarnation of the Father’s thought and love; in our own hearts without the aid of Church or preacher, creed or ritual, we may realise the presence of God. So we may think and so we may speak of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit without introducing the confused and confusing and un-Scriptural speech concerning a “Trinity” or “three persons in one God.”

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Presbyterian, Professor of New Testament Language, Literature, and Theology in the United Free Church College, Glasgow, commenting upon this verse (“The Expositor’s Greek Testament,” Vol. 2, 1900) anticipates Dr. Moffatt’s reading and says:

“If we ask ourselves point blank, whether Paul, as we know his mind from his epistles, would express his sense of Christ’s greatness by calling Him ‘God blessed for ever,’ it seems to me almost impossible to answer in the affirmative. Such an assertion is not on the same plane with the conception of Christ which meets us everywhere in the Apostle’s writings; and though there is some irregularity in the grammar, and perhaps some difficulty in seeing the point of a doxology, I agree with those who would put a colon or a period at ‘flesh,’ and make the words that follow refer not to Christ but to the Father.”

Here the question will obtrude itself upon your minds: "Is it not said that Jesus was born in some way different from us? Was he not born without a father? Has not the statement of the creeds, 'conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,' Scripture to support it?"

The story of the virgin-birth of Jesus has priceless value for the Church. It has made its way into our creeds, our hymns, our Christmas legends. It would be difficult to imagine the centuries and the ages and the world of our day without the story of the Virgin-mother and her Child. Yet the value of the birth-stories lies, not in their statement of fact, but in their effort to construct a theory. In plain words, the stories of the virgin-birth of Jesus in two of the Gospels and the dogmatic assertion of the creeds represent the attempt of the Church, too early made, in its fresh impulses of adoration, to explain the inexplicable personality of Jesus.

It was not the attempt of the whole Church. It was not the attempt of the complete Apostolic body. We have four Gospels. From two of them the birth-stories are missing. Matthew and Luke preserve the narrative of the miraculous birth. Mark and John do not. Mark is our earliest Gospel. He has not a word to say about the virgin-birth. John has most to say about the incarnation. From the Gospel which bears his name we take this noble text: *In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.* But John does not mention the incidents connected with our Saviour's birth. Luke's Gospel, as Luke himself tells us, is a compilation from previously existing material. Luke had Matthew or Matthew's original before him as he wrote; so that the sole authority for the stories in the four Gospels is Matthew. And even so far as Matthew's Gospel is concerned the case is by no means clear. In the latest translation of the New Testament Dr. Moffatt accepts without comment the reading from Von Soden's edition of the Greek New Testament and boldly translates

(Chap. 1, v. 16), "Joseph, to whom the virgin Mary was betrothed, the father of Jesus."

It was the flash of Peter's insight and the flight of his inspiration which aroused such joy and thanksgiving in the heart of Jesus when at Cæsarea, Peter, speaking as man had never spoken before and as perhaps man has never spoken since, burst forth, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God"; yet Peter makes speeches and preaches sermons which are recorded and writes epistles, but never mentions the birth-stories. Paul lived and loved and died, won barbarian tribes for Christ, argued with the university men of Athens and with patrician and plebian in Rome, compelled the admiration of Roman judges and senators and the love of soldiers, slaves, and slum-dwellers in the City of the Seven Hills, and caused the Cross of Christ to flame through the darkness of Paganism in every city of the Mediterranean—but, as far as the record tells, he never once referred to the virgin-birth. One of two conclusions is obvious and indisputable. Either Mark, John, Peter, and Paul never heard about the miraculous birth; or else, being familiar with the story, not one of them felt that it was necessary to repeat it.

We cannot hope to love Christ more tenderly than did the disciple whom Jesus loved. We cannot hope to preach Christ more faithfully, bravely, and effectively than did the Apostle to the Gentiles. We cannot write a better Gospel than Mark's. We cannot rise to the height of a loftier inspiration than that of Peter. And these all were what they were, did what they did, lived their splendid lives, died their glorious deaths, and they sit on thrones, giving laws to humankind; but they never once found it necessary to ground their faith in the virgin-birth of Jesus nor fortify their preaching by it. It is not open to question that these men believed in the divinity of Christ. One might almost say that they believed in nothing else! If they did not passionately accept Him as

divine, if they did not believe in His divinity with all their heart and with all their head, language has no meaning and history is a riddle. They believed—and their belief turned the world upside down.

If you are helped by the story of the miraculous birth as it appears in Luke and in Matthew, so be it. If it helps you, hold to it. But if, on the other hand, you choose to say, as for myself I do say, "I am on the side of Mark and John, of Peter and Paul; they could accept His divinity and serve Him through life and death without grounding their faith upon the stories of the virgin-birth and so can I"—if a devout student of Scripture speaks in this sense to us to-day Christian charity is bound to accept that view as permissible within the limits of our Christian liberty.\*

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\* There is nothing strange in this view of the birth of Jesus. What is strange is that persons familiar with the life of the Churches should find anything strange in it. Dr. Washington Gladden, in his grand old age, has just published a volume entitled "Present Day Theology." The following extracts are taken from pp. 142-3:

"The Scriptural proofs of the doctrine of the virgin birth are rather dubious. In only two of the New Testament books is it referred to. The Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke contain allusions to it. The Gospel of Mark, which is, by all, now admitted to be the earliest gospel, and the foundation of both Matthew and Luke, does not mention it. The Gospel of John, which is regarded as the chief proof of Christ's divinity, has not heard of it. The Apostle Paul, who is the author of thirteen of the twenty-eight books of the New Testament, never speaks of it. No word of Jesus reported in any of the gospels alludes to it. There are two genealogies of Jesus, in Matthew and Luke, and both of them make Jesus the son of Joseph. The story of the virgin birth in Matthew and Luke contradict each other at several points. There seems, certainly, to be much justification for the conclusion of many great Christian scholars that the stories in Matthew and Luke are late legendary additions to these gospels.

"I confess that I should be glad to know that He was one with us in the origin of His life as in the maintenance of it. It seems to me that this idea of the virgin birth tends to throw some discredit upon the sacredness of marriage, which is a tendency to be deprecated."

Dr. Gladden quotes from Dr. Mackintosh, a Scotch Presbyterian,

What then do we mean by the Divinity of Christ? In what sense is He divine?

In every hyman being there is somewhat of the divine nature; in Him that nature has taken full and complete possession of the whole being and God has tabernacled in the flesh. In all of us there is divinity and divinity of the same nature as was in Christ; but His being is full, saturated with that divineness whose lightest impress is all that some of us have known. We are all sons of God; but once in the history of the world the ever Living God took entire possession of One born of woman, and manifested Himself as never before or since for the redemption of the race; and the Christ is supremely the Son of God.

I know that many of you are ready with the question: "Then is the difference between us and Jesus Christ one only of degree and not of kind?" I beg you to consider very seriously the meaning of the words you use. You employ them so often that you think they convey a meaning to you; but they do not. A difference of what you call "kind" is most frequently created by an accumulation of differences of what you call "degree." What is the origin of species—the origin of kinds? Variations amongst individual members of the species, variations transmitted, becoming more marked, accumulating until you have a new "kind."

Consider this: even preserving your own words "degree" and "kind," then an accumulation of differences of "degree" is often more than a difference in "kind." For instance, if you were to take a savage digged out of the heart of some cannibal tribe, the lowest, most undeveloped specimen of a man that you could find; if you were to set him side by side with a gorilla or baboon, one of the

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the writer of a book which Dr. Gladden describes as "one of the most staunchly orthodox books on the Person of Christ." Dr. Mackintosh writes: "For my own part I should not think of regarding an explicit belief in the virgin birth of our Lord as essential to Christian faith; otherwise St. Paul was no Christian."

higher apes; is it not likely that you would find a greater difference between the lowest kind of man and the highest kind of ape than you would find between that undeveloped specimen of a man and, let us say, an Emerson or a Lincoln, a Gladstone or a Browning? It seems simple to say that the difference between the baboon and the savage is a difference of "kind" and the difference between the savage and Plato is a difference of "degree." But ponder quietly the sentence I have just employed: *an accumulation of differences of degree is often more than a difference of kind.*

Jesus Christ is different from us, peerless, unique; in Him is a fullness of divine nature, so exceptional, so supernal, that He stands alone. If you care to mark these differences by varying phrases, then it is easy to say that in us is divinity; Christ is divine. Or, if you will, you may say that you believe in the *divineness* of man and in the *divinity* of Christ.

In what sense is Jesus Christ our Saviour? What must we think of the Atonement?

Now observe once more that the word "atonement" does not appear in the New Testament. And again I remark that it is wisest and safest to speak of Scriptural realities in Scriptural language. The New Testament uses the word "reconcile" and "reconciliation." Jesus Christ reconciles us to God. He does not appease God's anger: there was no anger to appease. He does not propitiate God: God was always propitious. God's willingness to forgive us was not procured by the death of Jesus: He was always willing to forgive. God does not love us because Jesus died for us: Jesus died for us because God loves us. Christ does not reconcile the Father to us: the Father never needed to be reconciled. He reconciles us to the Father.

The distinction is of enormous importance. If it were possible to draw a line at any point between the old theology and the new it would have to be drawn here. The question is: "Was the atonement something done

toward God or toward men?" The answer which the preaching of our day makes is perfectly clear. It is something done toward men. It effects no change in the attitude of God toward us, for God loves us and God is Love. It effects a change in our attitude toward God, for we were disobedient, unfilial, ungracious. And through the Cross of Christ and all that it represents we turn to seek filial relations with God.

Let there be no mistake about this. Much depends upon it. Let us make our appeal to that great doctor of the Christian Church, the Apostle Paul himself. Language could be neither clearer nor more emphatic than his. Weigh carefully these extracts from his writings:

Romans 5; 10, 11:

"For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by His life; and not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

Ephesians 2; 16:

"And might reconcile them both in one body (Jew and Gentile) unto God through the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby."

2 Corinthians 5; 18-20:

"But all things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God."

Colossians 1; 20-22:

"Through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, having made peace through the blood of His Cross; through Him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens. And you, being in time past

alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unreprovable before Him."

To return: I have used the word "atonement." I have done it deliberately. For I believe in the Atonement. Do you know what it means? It is *at-one-ment*. This is not a trick, a mere splitting up of the word into its syllables. This is what the word is in its birth, in its origin, in its essential meaning. It means *at-one-ment*, bringing together persons who were separated, making them "at one." Tyndal speaks of Christ as "an advocate, intercessor, or at-one-maker between God and man." *Atonement* is a comparatively new word, probably not older than the beginning of the sixteenth century. Shakespeare uses it frequently. Desdemona says that she would like to *atone* her husband and Cassio, meaning she will try to get them to patch up their quarrel and be "at one." Buckingham in "Richard III" tells the queen that the king is seeking to make *atonement* between Gloucester and her brothers.

This is the real sense of the Atonement. We who were in time past alienated and enemies are now "at one" with God.

Christ reconciles us to God by revealing to us the true nature of God. Did we think Him harsh, unjust, or even indifferent? He is our Father and He loves us. The first words of Jesus in His earthly life and His last breathe the Father's name. He never speaks to Him by any other name than "Father." Five prayers of His are recorded in the New Testament. In each one God is addressed as "Father" and in no other way. In one prayer which is contained in three verses of Matthew's Gospel "Father" occurs five times. In such terms He would have His followers pray.

The Father loves His children, loves all His children, desires all His children to live in love with Him. He seeks and saves His children. With Him "lost" only means

"not found yet." The Cross represents an agony of love in the Father's heart, His desire to seek and save His children. Jesus Christ is our Saviour and our Redeemer because He is the supreme revelation of the Father's will and the Father's love.

A question not of the first importance is nevertheless of sufficient consequence to claim an answer here. May we think of Jesus as a miracle-worker? What of the New Testament stories?

Without doubt I think of Him as a miracle-worker. The real miracle would be if such a being as He was had not the power to work miracles. What you can do with your life depends upon the quantity and quality of it. In Him was life! I do not pledge myself to an unhesitating acceptance of all the miracle stories as they appear in the New Testament. In the matter of some there may be a misunderstanding of metaphor, in others an accretion of legend. About some of the miracle stories I have no manner of doubt whatever. Some of the others in the form in which they are now related I do not accept in the same unhesitating way. About some of the others I hold my judgment in suspense. That "He healed many that were sick of divers diseases and cast out the demons by His word" I am quite sure. I am not by any means so sure that He caused a fish to be caught with a silver coin in its mouth! That He had power under certain conditions to call back the dead to life I should on sufficient evidence be prepared to believe. I hesitate to say that in the cases related the evidence is sufficient. The picture of Jesus as a miracle-worker I take to be a true picture. From a transcendent personality transcendent results were bound to flow.

These considerations lead us naturally to the question of the Resurrection.

His personality was so powerful that death could not kill Him! It had so powerfully impressed itself upon His disciples that after He was dead they knew He was alive.

They were more conscious of His presence than ever before. He rose from the dead. It is impossible for me to think of Him as dead. In the whole round of thought and experience and history, of transcendent and eternal things, nothing seems to me so certain as the fact that Jesus Christ triumphed over death and the grave; that He lives on still, ruling and reigning in His Church and in the hearts of men.

So, in outline, calling to my aid lucid and simple speech instead of academic phraseology, I have tried to show you how Jesus Christ is conceived and preached by the liberal theologian of our day. If I had not authority on my side I modestly hope that I should still have the courage to say these things. As a matter of fact I did say them in a book, now out of print, published more than twenty years ago. But I am not without influential support. Congregationalists accept no creed imposed by authority. No Congregational Church can say to another Church what it must believe. No teacher, however honored, and no assembly, however elected, can prescribe to us our beliefs. Nevertheless we are perfectly willing, as I have shown in this sermon, to tell anybody who is interested what we believe.\* And so the National Council of the Congregationalists of America, meeting in Kansas City last October, accepted and published a statement of the things most assuredly believed amongst us at the present time. The proposed new Creed had been long debated in the denomination. It was adopted with practical unanimity, with great heartiness and enthusiasm. This is how it runs:

"We believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, goodness and love; and in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord and Saviour, who, for us

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\* "There is a point at which caution passes over into insincerity; and, for a Church, insincerity is the unpardonable sin. If the preacher's word can not be trusted with regard to the seen, who will accept it with regard to the unseen? This is the rock upon which ignoble orthodoxies are broken; neither God nor man is served by a lie."—*The Nation* (London), January 24, 1914.

and our salvation, lived and died and rose again and liveth evermore; and in the Holy Spirit, who taketh of the things of Christ and revealeth them to us, renewing, comforting, and inspiring the souls of men."

Mark the things which are not stated. It is not said in this Creed that Jesus Christ is God. There is no word about the Trinity. The miraculous birth is not mentioned. The old dreadful views of the atonement are not there. It is not strange that a monthly magazine widely read by preachers in its issue for this very month cites this Creed as an admirable example both of things omitted and things stated, and praises the Congregationalists for omitting "the dozen and more doctrines over which theologians have spilt good ink and bad blood."

But let us go on with the Creed:

"We are united in striving to know the will of God as taught in the Holy Scriptures, and in our purpose to walk in the ways of the Lord, made known or to be made known to us. We hold it to be the mission of the Church of Christ to proclaim the Gospel to all mankind, exalting the worship of the one true God, and laboring for the progress of knowledge, the promotion of justice, the triumph of peace, and the realisation of human brotherhood. Depending, as did our fathers, upon the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, we work and pray for the transformation of the world into the kingdom of God; and we look with faith for the triumph of righteousness and for life and glory everlasting. Amen."

This is the glorious programme which stirs our hearts to-day. Theology can only contain an account of the things we think about God. Religion is life. The real matter is for us to be on the side of Jesus Christ. The real matter, in the language of the new Congregational Creed, is "to proclaim the Gospel to all mankind," is to labor "for the progress of knowledge, the promotion of justice, the triumph of peace, and the realisation of human brotherhood." Jesus Christ is the constructive force in human life and in society. He who is on His side makes, builds, raises up. He tunnels through mountains of human misery when he cannot cast them into the depths of the sea. He flings across gulfs of dark despair

bridges of eternal hope. He makes straight through the dreary desert of an uncivilised civilisation a highway for the march of an emancipated people. He who yields himself in simple loyalty to Christ and seeks to live in His spirit is a medium of light, a source of health, a centre of knowledge, a saving energy, a redemptive force, a power making for righteousness and making for love. If you will become a fellow-worker together with Him, seeking to bring His mighty kingdom in, difficulties which you may have experienced with regard to creeds will seem immeasurably remote and controversies about them unspeakably futile. Before you can define to your own satisfaction "justification by faith," Faith will justify herself in the unchallengeable sanctity and glory of her works. Before you can adjust with niceties of theological debate the relation of His perfect humanity to His effulgent divinity, with your life of love and service you will crown Him Lord of All.









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This is the front cover of a book. The main surface is covered in a dark, marbled pattern resembling stone or water. A prominent, lighter-colored emblem is centered on the cover, featuring a stylized tree or plant with intricate, winding branches and circular motifs. The right edge of the cover shows a vertical strip of dark, textured material, likely leather or cloth, which forms the spine and part of the front cover. In the bottom right corner, there is a small, rectangular white sticker with partially visible text.

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